

Of Ecclesiastical Principalities

It remains now only to reason about ecclesiastical principalities. All difficulties regarding them come before they are possessed, because they are acquired either by virtue or by fortune and are maintained without the one or the other, for they are sustained by orders that have grown old with religion, which have been so powerful and of such a kind that they keep their princes in the state however they proceed and live. These alone have states, and do not defend them; they have subjects, and do not govern them; and the states, though undefended, are not taken from them; the subjects, though ungoverned, do not care, and they neither think of becoming estranged from such princes nor can they. Thus, only these principalities are secure and happy. But as they subsist by superior causes,¹ to which the human mind does not reach, I will omit speaking of them; for since they are exalted and maintained by God, it would be the office of a presumptuous and foolhardy man to discourse on them. Nonetheless, if someone were to inquire of me how it came about that the Church has come to such greatness in temporal affairs despite the fact that, before Alexander, the Italian powers, and not only those that are called powers but every baron and lord, even the least, held her in low esteem in temporal affairs—and now a king of France trembles at her and she has been able to remove him from Italy and to ruin the Venetians—though this is known, it does not seem to me superfluous to recall a good part of it to memory.

Before Charles, king of France, came into Italy,² this province was under the power of the pope, the Vene-

1. Lisio and Bertelli read a singular “cause.”

2. Charles VIII, in 1494.

military exercises in repute, and they have many institutions⁴ to maintain them.

Thus a prince who has a strong city and does not make himself hated cannot be attacked; and if indeed there is someone who would attack him, he would have to retreat in shame, for worldly things are so variable that it is next to impossible for one to stand with his armies idle in a siege for a year. And someone might reply: if the people have their possessions outside, and see them burning, they will not have patience for this, and the long siege and their love⁵ for their own will make them forget the prince. I respond that a powerful and spirited prince will always overcome all these difficulties, now by giving hope to his subjects that the evil will not last long, now by giving them fear of the enemy's cruelty, now by securing himself skillfully against those who appear to him too bold. Besides this, the enemy reasonably would burn and ruin the countryside on his arrival, at a time when men's spirits are still hot and willing for defense; and thus the prince should hesitate so much the less, because after several days, when spirits have cooled, the damage has already been done, the evil has been received, and there is no more remedy for it. At that time they come to unite with their prince so much the more, since it appears he has an obligation toward them, their houses having been burned and their possessions ruined in his defense. And the nature of men is to be obligated as much by benefits they give as by benefits they receive. Hence, if one considers all this well, it should not be difficult for a prudent prince to keep the spirits of his citizens firm in the siege, at first and later, provided he does not lack the wherewithal for life and for defense.

4. lit.: orders.

5. lit.: charity.